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Senate confirms Heckler, Sporkin, 18 U.S. judges

By Christopher Simpson
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The Senate, hurrying to complete unfinished business before a planned mid-week adjournment, yesterday approved Margaret M. Heckler as U.S. ambassador to Ireland and Stanley Sporkin as a U.S. District Court judge.

The calendar-clearing move, made by unanimous voice vote, included confirmation of 18 judges. But lawmakers agreed to postpone until today a roll call vote on former Sen. James Buckley to become circuit court judge for the District of Columbia.

While the nomination of Mrs. Heckler, former secretary of Health and Human Services, was not expected to be opposed, Mr. Sporkin's confirmation came with surprising ease.

Mr. Sporkin had been the subject of controversy for 18 months. The Senate Judiciary Committee probed allegations that Mr. Sporkin, as CIA general counsel, shielded a senior CIA official during a news leak investigation.

In an unusual move, the commit-

tee held six closed hearings to discuss Mr. Sporkin's role in matters said to involve national security. Sen. Jeremiah Denton, Alabama Republican, spearheaded the investigation, which ended with allegations of improprieties not substantiated.

Mark Goodin, spokesman for the Judiciary Committee, said chairman Strom Thurmond, South Carolina Republican, agreed to allow all the nominees for federal judgeships to pass yesterday on a voice vote, provided a roll call vote on Mr. Buckley is recorded this morning.

Some Judiciary Committee members, along with Mr. Buckley's home-state senators — Lowell Weicker, Connecticut Republican, and Christopher Dodd, Connecticut Democrat — have blocked a floor vote on his confirmation since late October.

Opponents of the nomination have criticized Mr. Buckley, 62, a one-term senator from New York who was defeated in 1980 by Sen. Daniel Moynihan, for lacking legal experience and embracing strong conservative views on volatile issues such as abortion and civil rights.

An hour of debate on the nomination is scheduled this morning, with

a roll call vote before noon, according to Majority Leader Robert Dole, Kansas Republican.

Mrs. Heckler's approval as envoy to Ireland came four days after her replacement at HHS, Otis R. Bowen of Indiana, was confirmed by the Senate.

Although yesterday's action cleared a long-standing confirmation backlog in the Senate, two pending nominations were sidestepped. The first, Ralph E. Kennickell Jr., Mr. Reagan's nominee to become head of the Government Printing Office, is expected to pass today.

A spokesman for Mr. Dole said the confirmation was delayed until last week's formal approval by the Senate Rules Committee was received by the Senate. Mr. Kennickell was named acting public printer last year, but his confirmation was stalled after questions arose about the salary he listed on government personnel forms.

During confirmation hearings, Mr. Kennickell said he inadvertently misstated the salary he received in 1981, the last year he worked in the private sector. An FBI investigation was ordered, but the probe, which ended in November, concluded no crime had been committed.

The Senate also is expected to vote this week on the nomination of Terrence M. Scanlon to become chairman of the Consumer Product Safety Commission.